POETRY AND THE PIVOT STAGE

"MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM," THE OLD WAY AND THE NEW.

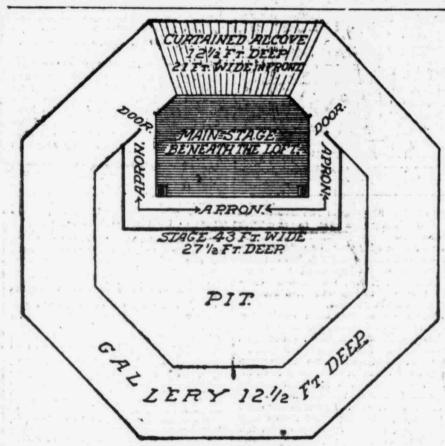
Shakespeare's Plastic Stagecraft vs. Modern Mechanical Triumphs—The Entire Text Without Pause—Shall We Lay Stress on Poetry and Acting, or on Scenery?

If Shakespeare were living now, Sir Henry Irving once remarked, he would be the first to take advantage of the mechanical and pictorial resources of the modern stage. But would he? In all the mazes of erudition and theory with regard to our ancient drama no problem has been more discussed and less understood than that of the practical sesthetics of the Elizabethan theatre—except perhaps that matter of Hamlet's madness. Now as it happens new light has lately been shed on the subject; and the production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at the new Astor Theatre affords the best object lesson in recent

in the popular mind the present performance, in which Miss Annie Russell appears as Puck, is associated with that in which Mr. Nat Goodwin appeared —and failed—as Bottom. But in reality it was inspired in the main by a more recent and notably successful production—that of last year at the Neues Theatre, Berlin. The German production had two signal features. First, it gave the entire text in the order in which Shake-

had no curtain, and indeed its position in the centre of an amphitheatre made it im-possible that it should have any. But there are innumerable stage directions that mention the arms or "purtaines" that concealed or disclosed the alcove stage at will. Two other features the stage pos-sessed which do not figure in the present play. (1) a gallery over the alcove used to figure a wall—that of Capulet's garden, Macbeth's castle or the city of Harfleur—and (2) windows in the upper tier of boxes—Juliet's window, Jessica's window or the window frem which the King looks down in "Henry VIII." Instead of the three or four scenes of the pivot stage it was thus possible to present in immediate succession five or six different places, though as a matter of fact a vast majority of scenes took place, for reasons which will develop, on the main stage.

The opening scene of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is in the court of Theseus at Athens. To indicate the locality there were probably chairs of state within the alcove and backed perhaps by a second curtain. The ducal train came in at one door and presently Egeus and his following at the other. When the audience was over both parties filed out as they had come in, the front ourtain of the alcove was drawn to and the chairs of state removed behind it. The old stage direction then says, "Manet Lyeander and Hermid." The editors have had perplexing difficulty here. W. A. Wright says, "It was a strange oversight on the part of Egeus to leave his daughter with Lysander"; and to make their secret plot more plausible Pope, Hanmer and Warbur-



THE ELIZABETHAN STAGE.

The octagonal form is that of Shakespeare's theatre (the Globe). The dimensions are those specified in the extant contract for building the Fortune (1599), which, however, was square (80 by 80 feet).

speare meant it to be given, and, by avoiding waits between the acts, in approximately the same time as was required on the Elizabethan boards; and, secondly, the woodland fairy atmosphere of the dream comedy was realized scenically with consummate eraft. For the first time, as a Berlin critic wrote, one saw the work of Shakespeare ; in the marketplace, as Romeo does. That without the hacking and contorting of a such petty considerations of scientic renameless collaborator, whose impossible task it had always been to abbreviate and rearrange the scenes so as to-make them sible on the ordinary modern stage and for the first time one saw Shakespeare's land of faery transmuted into scenery that was in harmony with its poetic charm of suggestion.

The means of presenting the full text rapidly and in the proper order was what the Germans call the Drehbuhne, or pivot stage. Behind the footlights is a turntable, on which it is possible to set three or four scenes at once and swing each before the footlights the moment it is required. It was the original intention of Mesers. Wagenhals and Kemper to construct the stage of the Astor on this plan; but the local fire laws (which in spi'e of everything threatened to turn "A Midsummer Night's Dream" into an All Winter's Pipe Dream, prevented this-the pivot stage could not be constructed without putting the system of patent sprinklers out of business and further reducing the already minute rill from the stage pump. Thus in the present production the customary delays between scenes—the tedious waits that have dragged out so many of Shakespeare's brisk and varied narratives of boredom-are inevitable, though reduced to a happy minimum. And beautiful as the production is as a whole, some of the atmospheric charm of the Berlin production is also lost.

Yet what cannot be done, or is not, in England and America can be done in progress sive modern nations, as, for example, Japan. where the pivot stage has already been installed, and actually is done in Germany. For the sake of our discussion let us assume that in the present instance Shakespeare had to choose between the pivot stagethe amplest resources of modern stagecraft -and his theatre on the Bankside. No play in the entire range of the Elizabethan drama is more favorable to the champions of the modern mise en scene, for none gives greater scope to scenic illustration, and none has fewer scenes or fewer changes of scene. Many of the plays, and the greatest of them, as "Romeo and Juliet." "Ham-"Lear" and "Othello," though easily and effectively run off in their entirety on the Elizabethan stage, present obstacles difficult and perhaps insuperable even to the pivot stage.

What, then, was the nature of the stage that afforded Shakespeare such freedom? Three centuries of the most pious and painstaking scholarship, which have left no ward of the text unguessed at, no comma unquestioned, only intensified the obscurity that has hung over the Globe Theatre on the Bankside. And yet the main features are so specifically set down in contemporary records or so plainly implied in the texts of familiar plays as to be patent to the most cursory view. Last spring I assembled them in an article in the Atlantic Monthly entitled "Shakespeare and the Plastic Stage." The present purpose is to apply them with greater detail in this

concrete example The features of the Globe Theatre which figure in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" may be seen at a glance in the accompanyng diagram. They were: (1) the main stage, which though s single platform breast high in the pit I have divided for convenience of illustration into the part beneath the loft-the under surface of hich was called the "shadow," or the heavens"-and the apron which surrounded it on three sides; and (2) ar alcover sehind the main stage and framed by what was in effect a proscenium arch. The

for the seene shifter, which means a break in the action. Fleay says that the scene was "plainly a street." When put to it the editors generally make Shakespeare's characters plot darkly in a thoroughfare, as here, or proclaim their inmost emotions alism were alien to the Elizabethan dramatic sense can be shown by innumerable instances. When there was any strikthe present play, Shakespeare was precise and vivid in the creation of local atmosphere But for the most part he did not trouble about it—the stage was merely the stage He himself bothered as little about irrele vant details of scene, and held as free s hand in the conduct of the action, as the modern novelist.

Next enter Quince. Bottom and their cre of artist artisans and broach the comedy business of their play. It is the moder practice to place their conference in Quince's cottage, with elaborate scenic detail. But here again the locality contributes nothing to the effect. With the scene which is to follow, however, the case is different. That takes place in the wood near Athens and introduces the fairies, and with them the atmosphere of imagination, of enchantment. Here Shakespeare will need all the

scene must remain as long as it is needed, which is through by far the larger portion of the play. This comedy business-Bottom was played by that arch low comedian Will Kempe-was here, as in many another play, relegated to the outskirts of the stage, which in modern parlance is called the apron; and while it was in progress the main stage beneath the heavens was being set with the woodland scenery, brought on, doubt, through the alcove curtain. During the shifting the artisans entered at one door, made the circuit of the apron while talking and went out at the other. In all respects save one the scene corresponded with the front scene of modern

to screen the shifting of stage properties. To us the practice seems crude enough In point of realism the pivot stage has an undoubted advantage. But it is to be remembered that on the Spanish stage the practice was precisely similar to that of the Elizabethan stage, and even on the Greek stage under Æschylus and Aristophanes. In the poetic drama there is small place for the pedantries of modern realism; and when, as now universally happens on the English speaking stage, they are achieved by cutting and disordering the text and dragging out the

practice-namely, that it was not possible

narrative they are madness. With the opening of the second act-again without pause-"Enter a Fairie at one doore. and Robin Goodfellow at another" and take ession of the main stage beneath the loft, or heavens. Of the precise nature of the scene they find set for them we have pretty accurate indication in the subsequent text. "I upon this bank will rest my head," says one of the lovers; and by and by all four lie down and sleep. It is the confirmed error of the commentators to regard the old playhouse and the old stage as small. Three to six hundred is their estimate of the seating capacity, whereas the extant contract for building the Fortune, in 1589, calls for a house that at the least estimate would seat 2,000. As for the stage, this play alone, if they had studied it, should have proved to them that it was larger than all but the largest in modern stages. The stage on which Mr. Belasco mounts his grandiose productions is only thisty feet wide. In addition to the four bahis, "A Midsummer Night's " calls for a "hawthorne brake which the artisan actors use as their "tyring house," and an open space for their re-hearea!—"This green plot shall be our

It is to be remarked, however, that on an ampitheatrical stage, viewed from all sides, no illuston of perspective is possible. Accordand properties stand out in the round. The stage was not pletorial, but plastic. Solid as the scenery undoubtedly was, it was not realistic, but symbolic. As pure decora-tion, however, it may have been very besttiful. The art of the middle ages-which was still the art of the people in Shake-speare's day—was essentially symbolic, yet gave scope to decorative compositions of the utmost beauty.

On the stage, moreover, this absence of pictorial illusion was the occasion of one supreme excellence. To create his atmosphere the playwright had recourse to the spoken word. Puck's opening speech,

Over hill, over dale, Thorough bush, thorough brier, Over park, over pale I do wander everywhere, Swifter than the moones sphere-

has been universally admired and quoted, and especially by those who contend that Shakespeare is to be regarded as a poet rather than as a dramatist. But, like almost every other such passage in the old drame, it arose from the necessity of creating the illusion of locality and space.

After Puck's colloquy with the Fairy, Enter the King of Fairies at one doore with his traine, and the Queen at another with And the business of suggesting poetio atmosphere goes on in the most workmanlike manner. "Ill met by moonlight," "paved fountain," "rushy brook, are a few of the concrete touches with which the mind of the bearer is invited to create pictures beyond the art of Shakespeare's-or any other-stagecraft. The scene ends with that ever memorable description of Titania's bower,

I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows, Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,

-the purpose of which is to prepare the mind's eye for that very bower which im-

mediately appears. Beyond reasonable doubt the alcove, cleared of the ducal throne of the first scene, now represents with considerable scenic solidity the sylvan court of the Fairy Queen. The stage direction reads, "Enter Queen of Fairies with her traine." But her words, "Sing me now seleepe," and the stage direction "She sleepes" clearly indicate that she is lying down. In point of fact "enter" was frequently used of an actor appearing in the alcove where we should say is disclosed." The quarto of "Othello" reads: "Enter Othello with a light and Desdemond in her bed" Beds were usually within the alcove and were made to "enter by drawing back the curtains. Juliet "falls asleep on her bed within the curtaines," and after she is found there and left for dead "they all go foorth casting rosemary on her and shutting the curtens." What happens in "Othello" is that the Moor enters by the door and drawing back the alcove curtains discloses Desdemons in her bed. Titania's bower likewise was doubtless within the alcove. Her first words call her "a Roundell and a Fairy song," which may have been quite elaborate, for the alcove was only nine or ten feet narrower than the general run of modern stages, and once the curtains were drawn back the dancers were at liberty to flow out on the main stage. At the end of the act it is probable that the alcove curtains were drawn to; but if so they were opened during the next act. In line 135, when the Fairy Queen awakes, she sees and falls in love with Bottom, who is on the main stage

For in Act III., Lysander and Hermia having gone off, the woodland setting is used, as we have seen, for the artisans to rehearse their play. It may be remarked in passing that this very scene is the most perfect evidence of Shakespeare's abhorrence of the attempt, even then being made to introduce elaborate scenic realism. The artisans know no other means of preenting moonlight and a wall than by lanthorn and rough cast. If Shakespeare neglected such devices it was because he understood the suggestive power of beautiful words. When the fairles lead Bottom with his ase's head, into the bower, the curtain is drawn and the woodland scene on the main stage is thus cleared for Oberon's entrance. The act ends with the four overs asleep in full view-one of the inerable evidences that the main stage was without curtain. The stage direction says "They sleep all the Act."

The precise significance of this is not be yond question; but "act" apparently means an entr'acte filled in by music. After so much unremitting action, it was probably found that the audience enjoyed and were refreshed by an intermission, as the most musical Germans have in each opera grosse Pause for conversation, beer and resources of his stage; and once set the

With the opening of Act IV., it is clear, the sleepers still hold the stage. The directions call for the entrance of the Queen and Bottom, which again doubtless means that the curtains of the alcove are drawn back. Now, however, there is "the King behinde them." Deep in the alcove Oberon is watching the spectacle of his rebellious Queen enamored of the clown with the ase's head. Thus, when "Enter Robin Goodfellow and Oberon," Puck comes in at a side door, and seeing him the Fairy King comes forward out of the alcove to the main stage, and calls his attention to Titania asleep in Bottom's arms. When Oberon and Titania go out Bottom is left napping and the four overs "lye still," i. e., are still asleep on their banks on the main stage. "Hornes and they wake." "Shout within, they all start "Exit lovers. Bottom wakes." While speaking his valedictory to his marvellous dream he probably comes forward into the woodland setting, the alcove curtains are drawn and Titanio's bower removed from behind them. This done, the woodland cene is drawn back into the alcove-a procedure little likely to disturb the audience while Kempe had them in the sway of his comic spirits. The main stage being cleared, the stage is again the stage. Bottom's comrades come on and make inquiries as to what has become of him in the wood. The line "Have you sent to Bottom's house?" indicates that they are again in Athens, though this is a matter of no great moment. Then Bottom enters to them, having just returned from the wood, and has the valedictory of the act, as is meet and proper.

During this second scene of fooling there has been time to reset the stage with such appurtenances as are necessary to the bridal celebration of the fifth and last act. The seats for Theseus and his court are doubtless in the alcove. The main stage s given over to the artisans and their play. which is the most important feature of the action. At the close the fairles come in again and dance and sing their songs of good omen-doubtless, also, on the main

The first and fifth acts, it will be seen centre in the court of Theseus at Athens. The three intermediate acts are in the land of fairy enchantment. Once the woodland scene is set it is never removed until it is done with, and both its setting and its removal are bridged over by ow comedy scenes on the apron, which h essential to the story, are least to be marred by the presence of shifters. Except for an intended

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consecutive as is possible on the modern pivot stage.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" belongs to a class of plays which we call save the mark!-musical comedy and spectacular extravaganza, and which includes The Tempest," and in a sense, perhaps As You Like It and "Twelfth Night In all of these plays the scenic element is unusually prominent, so that they are the fairest instances for the comparison in hand. In all Shakespeare shows the same regard for the manipulation of scenery as is shown by the most expert playwrights of the modern and pictorially realistic stage. And now we are prepared to consider whether the means at his disposal were more serviceable in the cause of poetic

drama than the modern stage at its best. The absence of scenes painted in perspective and the presence of scene shifters while the action is in progress would doubtless seem crude to a modern audience, and put its imagination ill at ease. But we must not underestimate the power exerted by any reigning convention. In Japan until lately our pictorial scenery was unknown. a party of Japanese on visiting a theatre on the Continent expressed amazement at a public that would accept as real a prison wall that swayed and shook with every draught, a tree the trunk of which was ob viously flat and the branches and leaves of which were impaled on a network of cords. Doubtless an Elizabethan playgoer, if he could come to life, would share their amaze ment. Only in one respect would he be likely to find improvement-in the use of lights; and even here he would not improb ably be offended by their garish exaggeration, which we accept without question.

When it is a question of producing Shakespeare, the picture stage has a further and ineradicable drawback. As we have seen, the most strikingly poetical lines were put in with a view to creating in the hearer's mind the images of things beyond the reach of the scene painter and the property man. When these gentlemen busy themselves in the attempt to embody Shakespeare's exquisite and varied suggestions they may delight dull minds; but no one worthy of the confidence which Shakespeare reposed in his audience can fail to have his pleasure impaired, his sense of beauty dulled. Illusive scenery is the death of any but the most infantile illusion. Crass paint and canvas weigh down the finer visions of the mind. A bastard art extinguishes the finest products of the literature of the

And with the intrusion of realistic scener the art of the actor has suffered. On the Elizabethan stage the prime requisites in the actor were a vivid and commanding presence and powers of elecution adequate to the projection of every subtle phrase of poetry. To-day the protagonist of the poetic drama is the scene painter. With eye and mind distracted by lights and pictures, the spectator has but a dull eye for the finer shades of plastic expression, a dull ear for verbal music, a dull mind for poetic suggestion. The two greatest modern producers of Shakespeare have been lavish in the use of scenery. But Irving halted the action has been as swift and and spoke as if his tongue were a door.

mat, and Beerbohm Tree poses and lisps. Actors may be bad when scenery makes it

of no avail to be good. The verdicts I have quoted from Germa critics indicate that at the Neues Theater the wedding of Shakespeare to realistic scenery was for once not unhappy. Let us assume that it was. Was it worth the expense? To build and equip the trde Shakespearian stage would cost scarcely more than a single spectacular scene in the modern manner, and once built it would enable us to produce the entire Elizabethan drama. Let us try the pivot stage by all means. But let us have also a stage on which the greatest works of the human imagination may become familiar and dear to us all in their habits as they lived. JOHN CORBIN.

THE BROOKLYN THEATRES. Francis Wilson at the Montauk-"The

Prince Chap" at the Shubert. Francis Wilson will begin his third season under the management of Charles Frohman at the New Montauk Theatre, Brooklyn, to-morrow night, presenting his latest comedy success, "The Mountain Climber. Mr. Wilson has an excellent supporting company, including May Robson. There will be no Wednesday matinée.

"The Prince Chap," with Cyril Scott as the star, opens at the Shubert Theatre to-morrow night for a week's stay. The clever children, Helen Pullman and Edith Spears, as originally, will share in the performance of little Claudia.

Nat M. Wills in "A Lucky Dog" will be at

The Broadway Theatre will have Virginian" with Dustin Farnum in the

"Bertha the Sewing Machine Girl" will be at the Grand Opera House. This is Theodore Kremer's latest thriller.

The Folly will have Lottie Williams My Tomboy Girl." Robert Hilliard will remain another week t Hyde & Behman's, his one act play "As

a Man Sows" having proved very popular Others on the bill are Werden and Gladdish with a fourply motion picture machine; the Four Melvins, Girard and Gardner, sam Collins and Burke and Dempsey. Heading the list at the Orpheum are Ned Wayburn's Rain-Dears, with Miss Neva Aymar. There will also be an additional stellar feature in Menetekel, a European

illusion which makes its first Brooklyn ap-pearance. There are also such favorites as Walter C. Kelly, Ed F. Reynard, the Lasky-Rolfe quintet, Germinal, Howard The bill at Keeney's is headed by Emmi Carus. The extra attraction will intro-duce Nick Long and Idalene Cotton. Others to appear are Miss Raffin's menkeys, H. V.

geraid, J. Francis Dooly and John and the Kaufman sisters. The Trocadero Burlesquers will be at the Gayety.

STRANGEST OF ANGLICAN MONKS. in Order of 18 Members Which Labors in the East, End of London.

The recent ritualistic investigations England have brought to light the existence of a society of monks who resemble their medieval predecessors more closely than any other of the Anglican orders. They located at Plaistow and are usually called the "Monks of Plaistow," after the place in which they are active, although their real title is the Society of the Divine Compassion. The most noted order of Anglican monks

is the Society of St. John the Evangelist, with headquarters at Clewer, in Berkshire. This order was formed some years ago to spread the advanced or ritualistic ideas in the Church of England and some of its members came to this country. The most important parish they founded was the Church of the Advent in Boston. There at one time was Bishop Hall of Vermont, who came to this country as Father Hall, S. S. J. E. some years ago. As it is a missionary society the word of the home house is absolute. whether it is a decision to send the members to Ceylon or Chicago. Some of the priests who have refused to obey such absolute domination have remained in this country.

The London order, which has just come to be talked about, confines its work to a parish of about 8,000 souls in the East End of London. The monks are beloved and respected by all the reople among whom they work, although their financial resources are meagre. It was one of these fathers who was recently asked to lead the unemployed in an East End demonstration and they were the most active workers in a hospital that sheltered the victims of the last smallpox epidemic in the East End. They are under the control of the Bishop of St. Albans, who has interfered with their practices only to the reserved. the Bishop of St. Albans, who has interfered with their practices only to the extent of asking them to remove the reserved sacra-ment from the high altar of their church. It is now kept in their private chapel.

It is interesting to note in this connection that the reserved sacrament is kept always on the altar in at least four New York Episcopal churches without the interference of the Bishops. The London monks, of course have confession, full ritual and all the services of the advanced wing of the English Church. In addition they say the canonical offices, which are lauds, prime, tierce, sext, nones, yespers and compline. All the offices are said in English.

The order was founded twelve ago by three young Oxford men of good family. The Bishop of St. Albans received the order and blessed the black cassocks, the sandals and cowls they wear. There are now only five fathers, three and ten novitiates in the the priests had a large parish which he gave up to join the monks, and one of the nevi-tiates was a successful painter. Another was a lawyer with a large practice. Every man who applies for admission must have some position to sacrifice before he will sidered. Sacrifice of some worldly good is indispensible to admission to the house in the country in which the novitiates

pass their period of probation.

It is in its means of subsistence that the Order of the Divine Compassion differs most strikingly from the other monks of the Anglican Church. It has no means of support but what the monks earn and what the poor people of its parish church contribute. One of the brothers has learned

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habits. Another is a printer and does much work for which he is paid. Another is the most popular optician and oculist in the region of the church. The monks preach missions is other churches and hold many services which are attended by many members of their own parish. They are immensely influential among the poor recople for whom they work so faithfully. Their only means of distributing charity among them comes from the occasional gifts of persons of wealth.

NOTES OF MUSIC EVENTS.

Vasili Safonoff will conduct the London Symphony Orchestra in Queen's Hall on October if and Josef Lhevinne, the Russian plantst, will be the soloist. Later Mr. Safonoff will direct the Phr harmonic Society of this city and Lhevinne our the country.

Dr. Karl Muck, the new conductor of the pston ymphony Orchestra, will sail from Bremen Kalser Wilhelm der Grosse on next Tuesde-tember 25, and is due to reach New Yor on Tuesday following, October 2. He will 20% d to Boston, where he will have the remander week in which to get used to his new so roundings The first public rehearsal and concest will take place on Friday afternoon and Satu evening, October 12 and 13 respective Muck's first Boston programme will be Beethoven'
"C Minor Symphony," Wagner's "A Faust Overture," "Slegfried Idyll" and the prelude to "Ty Mastersingers."

The Boston Symphony Quarter is to make the first trip to the West next week. Havill give dicerts in Rochester, Buffalo, Detroit and other cities, returning to Boston in time rst rehearsal of the orchestra, which Monday, October 8. Despite the early seath there has been a very considerable deman for the quartet, and it would have been as ear for them to have taken a three weeks trip as or

The Russian Symphony Orchestra, Modest Hall concerts of the coming season on instead of on Saturday evenings. After new music by Russian composers to this season will, it is said, be several we under the influence of the struggle throtheir country is passing. The dates for will be Thursday evenings, November 5 20, January 17, February 7, February 28 rd March 16

ent of the New York Hippodrome + their Sunday night concerts at the b he made arrangements with Frank 67th at this time the United States Mine Washington, which is composed estati under the direction of Lieut, Wila mann. A programme of excedenal at ness is offered that will no doul add to reputation the official band my enjoys out America and with foreign dultaries who

heard it play. Two Presidents.

From the Londor Tribune
The President of the Units States erson, but the president ! Harvard University